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PAST AND PRESENT TRADE ROUTES TO THE CANADIAN NORTHWEST

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Geological Survey of Canada

One of the interesting phases of the history of Western Canada, and one which has received but little emphasis, is that of transportation, particularly the changes in both routes and methods which have taken place largely because of the advance of the railroad. In the present period of railroads and lake steamers it is not commonly appreciated how great were the difficulties formerly encountered in carrying on an active trade between points as far distant from each other as Montreal and the upper Peace River or Hudson Bay and the lower Mackenzie, each a distance of over 2,000 miles. The character of the country and the nature of the waterways accentuated the difficulties of transportation and limited the supplies brought into the region to the bare necessities required for the fur trade. The development in the methods of transportation since that time and the consequent changes in trade routes form the subject-matter of the present article.

Historical Summary

From a geographical point of view the history of the Canadian Northwest may be divided into a number of periods which, though they overlap to a greater or less extent, are sufficiently distinct to be helpful in a survey of the larger historical features.

PERIOD OF ISOLATION

The first period may be described as one of isolation, with the country in possession of the Indian hunter and unexplored and undisturbed by the white man. Away to the east lay the French settlements at Quebec and Montreal and the English and Dutch on the Atlantic seaboard; but little did any of these conceive the extent of the continent which lay between them and the western sea.

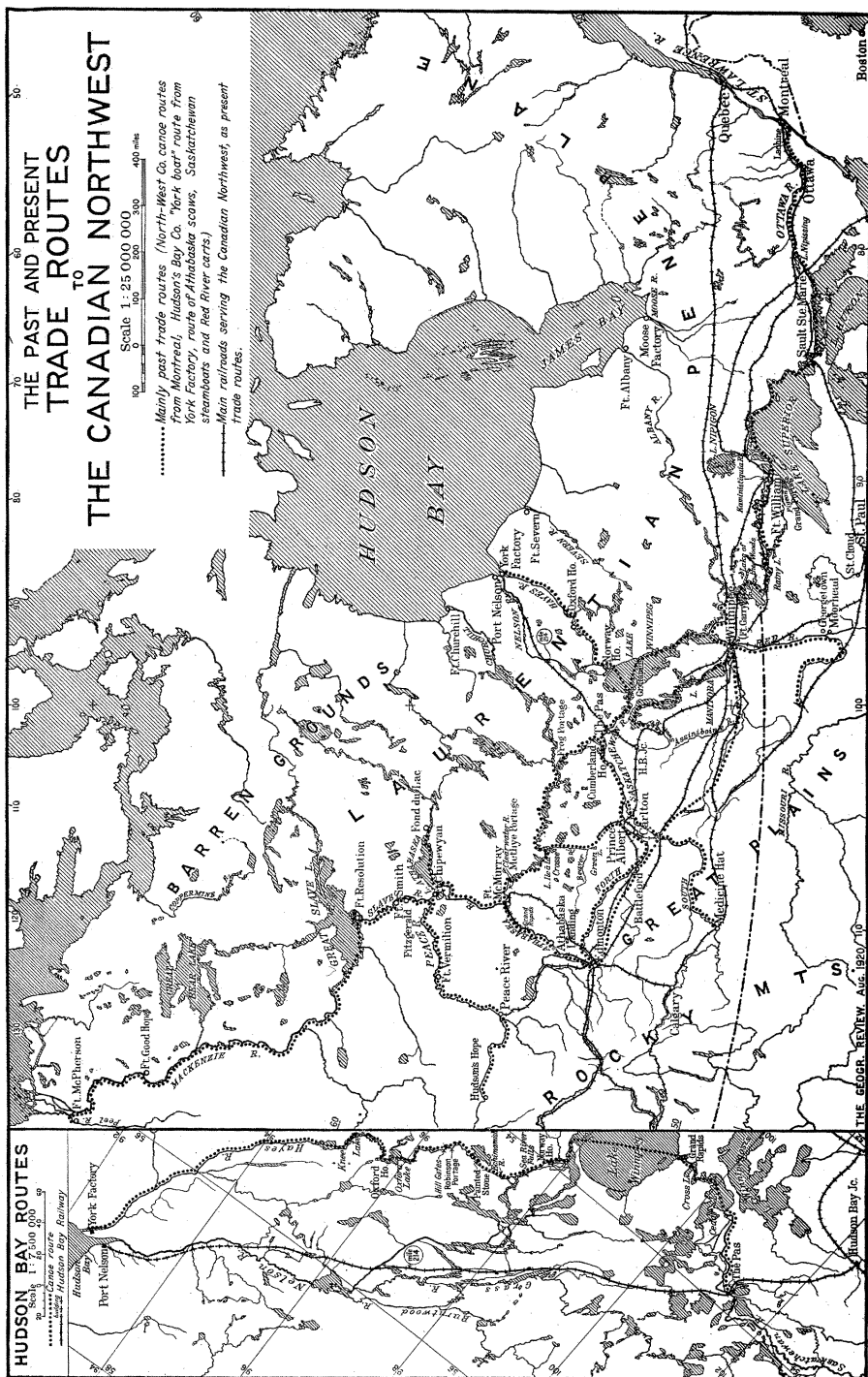


FIG. 1

THE TRADER REACHES THE BORDER

The second period is that in which the trader reaches the border of the great interior country. To the white man the resources of the country were twofold. Its broad extent, its soil and timber, suggested possibilities for the founding of new colonies. The immediate value, however, which first lured him was its fur trade. Contact was made at two points. The French from Montreal and Quebec advanced westward following the natural waterways and finally reached Lake Winnipeg. They ascended the Red River and in 1742 reached the Missouri. They also discovered Lake Manitoba and explored the Saskatchewan River to the forks. Thus the border was reached from the south.

Contact was also made in the northeast on the shores of Hudson Bay. In the year 1670 a charter was granted by King Charles II to "The Governor and Company of Adventurers of England Trading into Hudson's Bay" giving them the monopoly of the trade, fisheries, minerals, etc., of all the lands bordering on Hudson Bay, in return for which the company was to govern and defend the territory. Trading posts were established first on the coasts of James Bay and then on the western coast of Hudson Bay. These posts were all located at the mouths of important rivers which offered communication with the interior. The Indians were induced to come to the forts to trade, and, as long as their fur-loaded brigades came annually to the posts, no attempts were made by the English traders to penetrate inland. The long trips which the natives made to the coast forts showed how great was their desire for the company's goods. For example, as late as 1782 the Chipewyan Indians of Lake Athabaska sent or carried their furs overland to Fort Churchill at the mouth of the Churchill River, a journey which occupied five or six months and in which they were often reduced to the greatest extremities of hunger and fatigue owing to the scarcity of game in the region which they crossed.

THE TRADER PENETRATES INLAND

A new period began when it became necessary for the trader to penetrate inland. After the transfer of Canada to the British in 1763 a great influx of English-speaking merchants, many of them of Scottish descent, took place to Montreal. These soon found the fur trade of the interior to be very profitable, and it was not long before their *voyageurs* had rediscovered the old French canoe routes and penetrated even farther into the Northwest. Their trading operations with the Indians were so successful that they resulted in the obtaining of much of the fur that ordinarily went to the Hudson's Bay Company. This stopping of the flow of furs to their forts aroused the English company to the fact that, if they were to retain the trade, it was necessary to establish inland posts; accordingly, in 1774, Samuel Hearne, famous for his overland voyage from Fort Churchill to the Coppermine River in 1769-1770, established Cumberland House on Sturgeon Lake north of the Saskatchewan River, and the contest between the Scotch merchants of Mon-

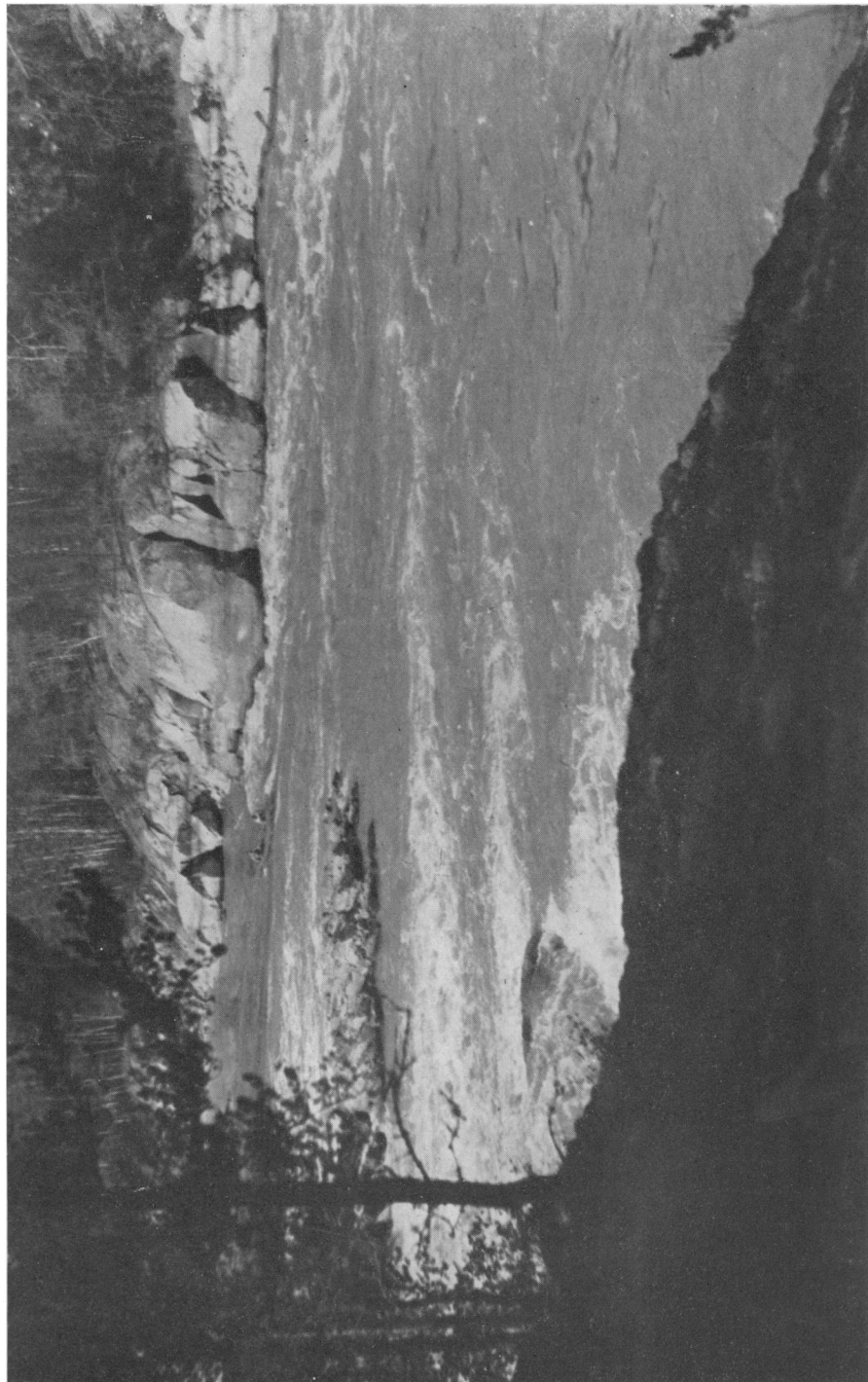


FIG. 2—Running a rapid on "The Elbow," one of the branches of the Nelson River below Cross Lake. (Photo by L. G. Thompson. The illustrations in this article are chiefly from official photographs of the Geological Survey of Canada.)

trealm and the English merchants of the Hudson's Bay Company was actively begun. The union of the Montreal merchants in the year 1784 into one North-West Company intensified the competition, for there were now two strong organizations each striving for control.

This period of rivalry was also an era of important exploration, since it was realized that the posts established nearest the hunting grounds received the trade. Some of the more important features of this may briefly be summarized. Under the North-West Company the old Kaministiquia route from Lake Superior to the Winnipeg River was rediscovered, and the exploration of the Red, Assiniboine, and Saskatchewan Rivers was accomplished. A new route from Lake Nipigon to the Winnipeg River was found, and also the route from the Saskatchewan to the Churchill River by way of Frog Portage and from there the route by way of Methye Portage to the Athabaska River. Lake Athabaska and the Peace River were discovered, and in 1789 Alexander Mackenzie, a North-West partner, followed the river which bears his name to the Arctic Ocean. In 1793, on a second journey, he reached the Pacific Ocean from the headwaters of the Peace, the first white man to cross the continent. Of other exploits of the North-West explorers may be mentioned the discovery of several important passes through the Rocky Mountains and the descent of the Fraser and Columbia Rivers to the ocean.

To the Hudson's Bay Company are due the exploration of the Nelson and Hayes Rivers and of the Churchill as far as Frog Portage and the discovery of Great Bear and Great Slave Lakes and the Coppermine River by Samuel Hearne. The Saskatchewan was also followed to the upper waters of both of its branches.

The rivalry led to many conflicts in the wilderness between the men of the two companies. Those employed by the North-West Company were largely French Canadians, and the company especially sought those who were eager for physical conflicts with their rivals. The men of the Hudson's Bay Company, on the other hand, were mainly Orkney Islanders, less quarrelsome but marked by great loyalty to their company.

THE SETTLER REACHES THE BORDER

The next stage in the history of the region may be described as that in which the settler reaches the border. In 1811 Lord Selkirk of the Hudson's Bay Company sent out a contingent of settlers from Scotland, and in 1812 they arrived at the Red River. In 1815 another band arrived. A new era had begun in which it was realized that the country had a source of wealth other than furs. The arrival of settlers was, however, not at all welcome to the traders of the North-West Company, and the climax of the struggle between the two rival organizations was reached on June 19, 1816, when Governor Semple of the Red River colony and twenty of his men were killed at Seven Oaks by North-Westerners. The final result was a union of the two companies in 1821 under the name of the Hudson's Bay Company.

After the union the operations of the company attained their maximum extent, reaching down along the North-West Company's routes into Oregon and later into northern British Columbia and the Yukon.

THE SETTLER DEVELOPS THE PLAINS

The final period, which may be considered to extend to the present, is that marked by the westward advance of the settlers as they spread out over the Great Plains. Settlements grew up first around the old trading posts of the plains, then along the trails and rivers, and finally along the railroad as rapidly as it advanced. Henceforth trade with the settlers was to take precedence over the fur trade on the prairies. North of the settled belt, however, in the regions where agriculture is impossible, the fur trade maintains its old importance. On the Saskatchewan trade in connection with a new mineral interest has recently developed, and Cumberland House, instead of being a gateway to the fur wealth of the Athabaska region, has become the point of entrance to a new copper and gold belt.

The latter part of this period of settlement is chiefly marked by railroad development. Since 1879 the railroad has extended out over the Great Plains in all directions, and wherever it has gone it has caused the abandonment of the pioneer methods of transportation.

The Route from Montreal

As already stated, the early important posts of the Hudson's Bay Company were on the coast of Hudson Bay, while the headquarters of the North-West Company were at Montreal. The former, therefore, had a much shorter distance to transport their trading supplies than the merchants of Montreal. They also brought in a superior quality of goods, which the Indians soon recognized, and in addition they established a reputation for fair dealing, both of which tended to give them a decided advantage over their North-West rivals. The latter, however, had certain considerations on their side in the contest. From Lake Winnipeg westward the routes followed by the rival traders were practically identical, and the North-Westerners in their swift canoes usually had little difficulty in outracing the slower boats of the traders from the bay. The French Canadians, besides being expert canoeemen, were also quick to learn the language of the Indians and to make friends with them, although they never succeeded in inspiring the respect which the English company's traders commanded.

Two water routes could be followed from Montreal to Lake Superior. One led from the St. Lawrence River by way of Lakes Ontario and Erie to Lake Huron. The one more commonly used by the fur traders, however, was by way of the Ottawa River (see map, Fig. 1). The half-way post between Montreal and the Northwest was first at Grand Portage on Lake Superior, near the mouth of the Pigeon River, but when this became American territory a new route was sought by the North-West Company. One

was found by way of Lake Nipigon, but later a better route was discovered and a new headquarters post, named Fort William, was accordingly built at the mouth of the Kaministiquia.

METHOD OF TRANSPORTATION

The supplies that were to be distributed throughout the Northwest as far as the Athabaska country were carried from Montreal in canoe brigades. The canoe commonly used was the large birch-bark "rabascaw" with high, rounded ends and about 33 feet long and 4½ feet wide, or, as the canoemen would describe it, the "five-and-a-half fathom variety." Its cargo con-



FIG. 3—A bark canoe on the Missinaibi River, 1901. It was this type of canoe that was used by the French-Canadian *voyageurs* of the North-West Company. (Photo by D. B. Dowling.)

sisted of 1,000 pounds of provisions and 60 pieces of merchandise for trade, each weighing from 90 to 100 pounds. Including the weight of the canoe-men, of whom there were eight to a canoe, and their personal bags weighing 40 pounds each, the load was therefore about four tons. As the operations of the traders widened, the brigades steadily increased in size. The early Montreal traders sent out brigades of three or four large canoes, often accompanied by smaller ones. Around 1800 the squadron that left Montreal in the spring usually consisted of about thirty, divided into three brigades. Later, when the North-West Company was at the height of its power, brigades numbering from ninety to one hundred large canoes would gather at Lachine immediately above Montreal for their journey to Fort

William. With these brigades would be thirty or forty guides and usually a partner of the company in command, traveling in state in a smaller, swift canoe.

MONTREAL TO FORT WILLIAM

From Lachine the canoes proceeded up the Ottawa River, past the Long Sault Rapid—the Chaudière Falls at the site of the present city of Ottawa—and on over thirty-six other portages. From the Mattawa, a tributary of



FIG. 4



FIG. 5

FIG. 4—A York boat.

FIG. 5—York boats on the Echimamish, a stream connecting the Hayes and Nelson Rivers drainage.

(Photos by E. L. Bruce.)

the Ottawa, the divide was crossed to Lake Nipissing, and then the route lay downstream to Lake Huron. There the brigades would sweep along the north shore, in fair weather traveling from three o'clock in the morning until late in the evening; then up the St. Mary's River, past the Sault Rapid and into Lake Superior; skirting the north shore of the lake, they hurried on to Fort William. There a couple of weeks were usually spent in preparing for the return journey, and then the canoes, loaded with furs collected from the West, started on their return journey to Montreal.

FORT WILLIAM TO LAKE ATHABASKA

From Fort William new brigades starting in August carried the trading supplies to the far distant points of the West. Smaller canoes about twenty-four feet in length, easier to portage than the big canoes used on Lake Superior, were used in these Western brigades. The route led up the Kaministiquia River to the height of land and thence downstream to Rainy Lake. On every long portage was a cabin where food and drink could be purchased by the *voyageurs*. On Rainy Lake the fur brigades from Athabaska were often met by the *voyageurs* from Montreal, since it was usually too long a journey for the former to go as far as Fort William and to return in the same season. On the lakes the brigades frequently had the opportunity to take advantage of a fair wind. Canoes would then be lashed together, sails



FIG. 6—York boats under sail, Cross Lake. The York boat has been the usual means of conveyance between Hudson Bay (York Factory) and Lake Winnipeg (Norway House). (Photo by M. McIvor.)

hoisted, and the canoemen could rest from their paddles. Often over one hundred canoes would thus be seen together.

From the Lake of the Woods the brigades followed down the turbulent waters of the Winnipeg River, a stream with so many falls and rapids that it was called by the *voyageurs* the White, or Foaming, River. Arrived at the southern end of Lake Winnipeg, the brigades separated. Some would cross to the mouth of the Red River and ascend it to the mouth of the Assiniboine. Here a further division would take place, some ascending the Red River with supplies for the natives as far as the Missouri River; others would ascend the Assiniboine for trade on Lake Manitoba and the Swan River country. The northern brigades for the Saskatchewan and Athabaska, however, proceeded from the mouth of the Winnipeg River along the eastern shore of Lake Winnipeg, and then across its northern end to Grand Rapids at the mouth of the Saskatchewan River. Above what is now the

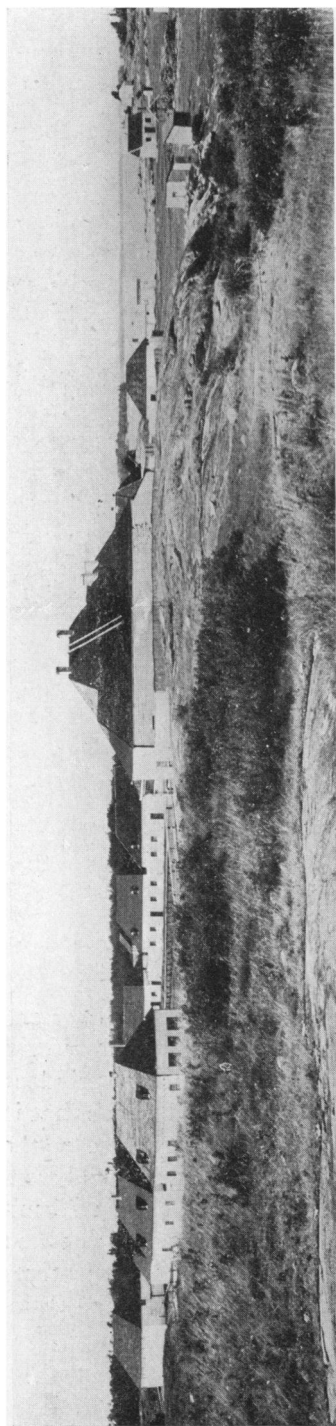


FIG. 7.—Norway House, a Hudson's Bay Company's post on the eastern branch of the Nelson River near the outlet of Lake Winnipeg. Norway House was long one of the company's most important posts. (Photo, 1919, by F. J. Alcock.)

town of The Pas on the Saskatchewan, a separation took place. Some of the brigades proceeded up the two branches of the Saskatchewan. Those bound for Athabaska, however, left the Saskatchewan near Cumberland House, crossed Cumberland and Sturgeon Lakes, and ascended the Sturgeonweir River to Frog Portage, where a portage of four hundred yards took them into the waters of the Churchill River. The Churchill was then ascended through Lake Isle à la Crosse to its headwaters in Lake la Loche.

Here, between Lake la Loche and the waters of the Athabaska basin, lay the famous long portage known as Methye Portage, or Portage la Loche. Its length is $12\frac{1}{4}$ miles, and for a period of one hundred years it formed the most serious obstacle in the transportation to and from the Athabaska country. For most of its distance the trail crosses a level sandy surface covered with pine and spruce. About a mile from the north-western end, however, is an abrupt rise, about 600 feet high, which consists of a series of eight steep hills whose ascent and descent for the *voyageurs* carrying packs or canoes proved equally difficult. From the summit of the portage the view overlooking the valley of the Clearwater River has been described as one of the most beautiful scenes on the continent. Once across the long portage the brigades had a downstream route along the Clearwater and Athabaska Rivers to Fort Chipewyan on Lake Athabaska, the important rendezvous and distributing point for the Athabaska-Mackenzie region.

The Route from Hudson Bay

The main route of the Hudson's Bay Company by which supplies and merchandise were taken from the coast to

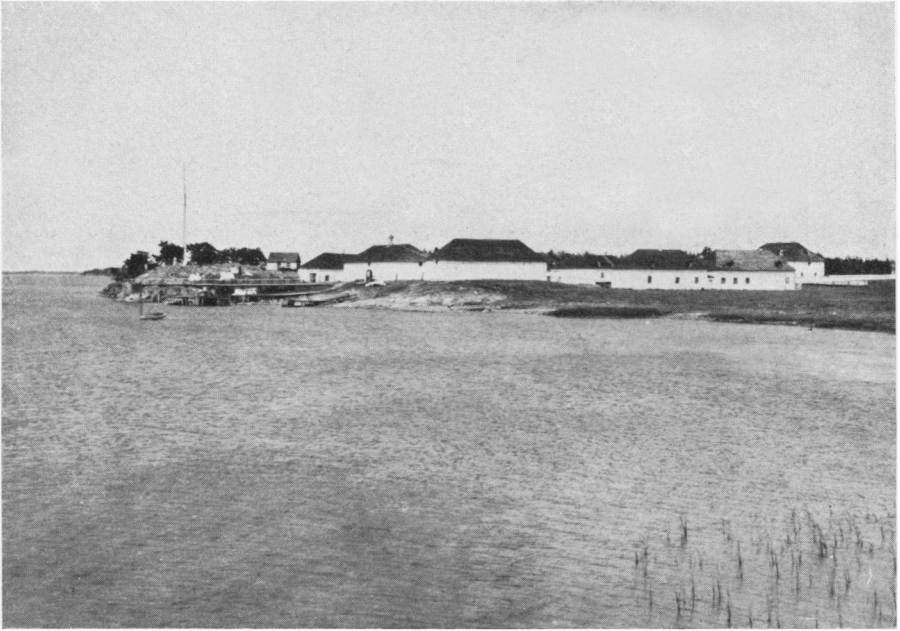


FIG. 8



FIG. 9

FIG. 8—Norway House. (Photo by F. J. Alcock.)

FIG. 9—Inside the quadrangle, Norway House. (Photo by E. L. Bruce.)

their inland posts as far as the lower Mackenzie River was for nearly one hundred years the Hayes River. Other rivers, such as the Churchill, the Albany, and the Moose, were important in supplying large areas, but the main highway for the West began at York Factory.

YORK FACTORY

The history of York Factory may be said to have begun in 1682, when two French-Canadian adventurers, Radisson and Groseilliers, who earlier had been largely responsible for the formation of the Hudson's Bay Company and had led its first expeditions to the bay, reached the Hayes River and built Fort Bourbon on its northwestern bank. In 1684 Radisson re-entered the service of the Hudson's Bay Company and took possession of Fort Bourbon, renaming it York. In 1694 York was captured by the French under the command of Pierre le Moyne d'Iberville and was retained by them for two years, when it was recaptured by the British. In 1697 d'Iberville, after defeating a British fleet in the bay, again captured York, and again it became Fort Bourbon. In 1713 by the Treaty of Utrecht it was given back to the British and occupied by them until 1782, when it was once more captured and burnt by the French. In the following year a new fort was erected. In 1792 new buildings situated a mile upstream on the present site of York Factory were completed.

York long remained the Hudson's Bay Company's most important post. Once a year the company's ship arrived from England with provisions and articles for trade, and it was a rule to keep at least two years' supplies for all the posts of the interior in the large warehouses to guard against all contingencies. Part of the merchandise received from England came packed in bundles suitable for the trip inland: for example, bales of blankets and cloths, kegs of gunpowder of 66 $\frac{2}{3}$ pounds weight each; chests of tea of 50 and 100 pounds weight; cases of soap; cases of Indian flintlock guns and rolls of tobacco, etc. Other articles were repacked, however, at York. In this repacking care was taken not to place all of the articles of one kind intended for a particular post in the same bale, so that, should any pack be found missing, the loss for a particular post would not be total in respect to any one necessity. Similarly, in bringing fur out from the interior to York each bale was made up of pelts of various kinds in order not to run the risk of losing a pack which might consist entirely of the more costly furs. Besides the materials brought out from England, many articles were manufactured at York for the trade inland. Blacksmiths and tinsmiths made such articles as Indian axes, ice chisels, fish spears, nails, tin kettles, cups and bowls in nests, and many other articles. York Factory to a certain extent was a real factory.

METHOD OF TRANSPORTATION

The trip inland was made, not with canoes like the North-Westerns, but in pointed, flat-bottomed vessels about 35 feet long, known as York boats. Each boat was manned by a crew of eight or ten and could carry about

five tons of cargo. In the early days the crews consisted of Orkney men, but later when the brigades increased in number it became necessary to employ Cree Indian crews, and the problem of getting sufficient men to man the boats was often acute. On lakes and smooth streams the boats could take off a fair breeze by hoisting a large square sail; when there was no such favorable wind they were rowed by eight oars and steered by a long sweep at the stern. Going upstream the vessels were commonly tracked with a

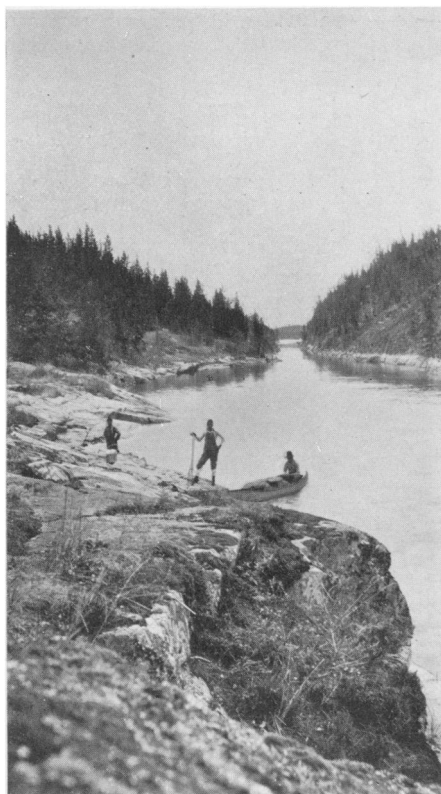


FIG. 10

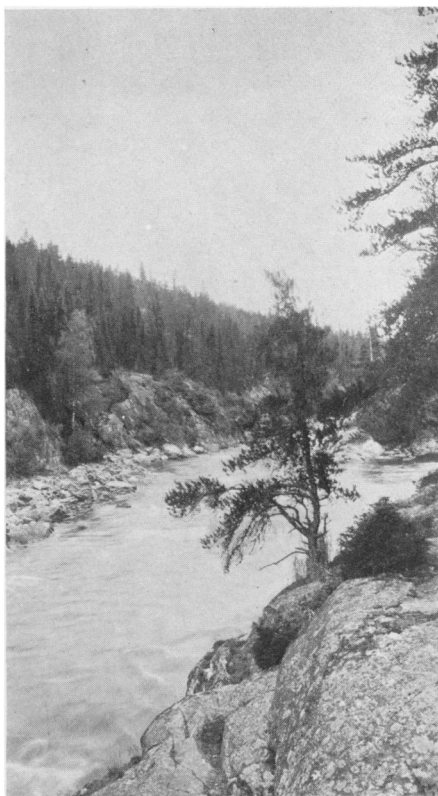


FIG. 11

FIGS. 10-11—Two views of the gorge known as Hill Gates on the Hayes River above Oxford Lake. (Photos by E. L. Bruce.)

long towing line by the crew walking along the bank. The portages around falls and rapids were cut into regular roads, and smooth poles were laid down every few feet, over which the crews hauled their boats. The boats traveled in brigades composed of four or five boats, and, though each crew carried their own cargo across the portage, they usually united to take the boats across. On portages where the boats had to be pulled up over a hill a windlass was commonly stationed at the summit. The rivalry between the crews of the different boats led to a much greater amount of speed and

effort than when a boat was traveling alone. The racing sometimes had a practical significance. In June, 1919, while the writer was making a portage at Sea River Falls on his way down the Nelson River, he had the opportunity of seeing an example of this in a race between five empty York boats which were ascending the river. The boats rowed up and took their positions behind one another at a rock in the rapids, and the crews of all five worked in getting the first up over the fall. When this was done its crew immediately got in and rowed on. The second proceeded likewise. When the turn for the third came, however, there were not enough men to get it over, and the last three boats had therefore to row down to a side channel where the ascent was more gradual and required longer work.

The rivalry was not only between the separate boat crews but extended down to the individual members of the crews. A common load across a portage consisted of two pieces, but great pride was taken in carrying three or even more at a single trip and in crossing either way on the run. The attitude adopted was that the quicker the disagreeable work was finished the better. Spells of hard work alternating with periods of rest was the type of work most acceptable to the Indian, and the traders soon found they could accomplish more by adopting this method. In tracking, the boat crew was commonly divided into two parts, one of which rested on board, while the other worked, with a change every half hour. They frequently adopted the same plan in rowing. When there was a head wind on a lake they calmly waited for more favorable weather, and then, when it arrived, would travel early and late at high pressure to make up for lost time.

YORK FACTORY TO NORWAY HOUSE

The first part of the journey from York up the Hayes meant tracking for the most part, and farther on, where the stream became swifter and rapids numerous, besides tracking it became necessary in places to row, pole, push, and warp. On Knee and Oxford Lakes there was often an opportunity to sail, which meant a rest and sleep for the hard-worked crews. Above Oxford Lake there was more upstream work. At one place, known as Hill Gates, a gorge three-quarters of a mile in length is so narrow that the York boats cannot at certain points use their oars for rowing. Farther on at Robinson Portage boats and cargoes have to be taken overland for a distance of about a mile. Fifteen miles above Robinson Portage the route leads up a narrow stream known as the Echimamish, a Cree name, meaning a river which flows both ways. It is a narrow shallow creek winding through a grassy marsh, and sufficient water for boat travel is kept in it by dams. These dams were originally the work of beaver, but after these were exterminated, the dams were kept in repair by the company. At what is known as the Painted Stone a short portage leads across the divide to the part of the Echimamish which flows westward to the Nelson River. Arrived on the Nelson it was upstream once more to Norway House on the eastern branch of the Nelson near the outlet of Lake Winnipeg.

NORWAY HOUSE TO METHYE PORTAGE

Norway House long occupied a position among the posts of the company second in importance only to York Factory. The goods received from England in the summer were repacked at York during the succeeding winter. In the following summer these goods were freighted to Norway House and stored there for the winter to be carried in the succeeding freighting season to Methye Portage. This journey to the divide between the Hudson Bay and Mackenzie River slopes was also made by York boat brigades manned by Indian crews. The route led across the northern end of Lake Winnipeg to the mouth of the Saskatchewan River. Here were encountered the



FIG. 12—A Red River cart brigade. The Red River carts were used in the pre-railroad days for transportation across the Great Plains from Fort Garry (Winnipeg) to Battleford and Edmonton. (Photo by George M. Dawson.)

Grand Rapids of the Saskatchewan River, approximately three miles in length. A portage a little over a mile long leads past the most troublesome part of the rapid. The boats were commonly tracked with half a load up the rapid to the foot of the portage, unloaded, run down again, and then tracked up once more with the remainder of the load. The cargoes were then portaged, and the boats, each with about 1,300 pounds of cargo left in, were pulled up the southern side of the rapid to the upper end of the portage. When the brigades were small and poorly manned they frequently took boats as well as cargoes over the portage. A tramway $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles in length was eventually built in 1871 to portage the cargoes past the entire length of the rapid. Above the expansions west of Grand Rapids known as Cross and

Cedar Lakes, the current of the Saskatchewan is strong and the boats were tracked most of the way to Cumberland House. From here the route followed was the same as that employed by the North-West canoe brigades, up the Sturgeonweir, across Frog Portage to the Churchill River, and on to the long Methye Portage. For a time the York boats were dragged overland across the long portage, but it was eventually arranged that two brigades of boats should operate, one from Fort Chipewyan on Lake Athabaska to Methye Portage and one between Methye Portage and Norway House. This eliminated the arduous work of dragging the heavy boats such a distance but, on the other hand, necessitated careful planning on the part of the officials at Norway House in order that the two brigades should meet at the portage without a long wait by either party. Sometimes it was im-



FIG. 13—The tug *Victor*, plying between Warrens Landing, at the northern end of Lake Winnipeg, and Norway House. Steamers run weekly from June to early October from Selkirk on the Red River to Warrens Landing.

possible to restrain the Indian crews from starting back home with empty boats without waiting for the arrival of the fur cargoes from the Athabaska region.

YORK BOAT FREIGHTING

York boat transportation reached its maximum when the supplies for the Red River colony as well as for the Western trading posts were brought in by the route from Hudson Bay. In the year 1858, 167 boats passed Norway House on their way to York Factory to return with supplies for the Red River settlements. These belonged to private merchants and traders as well as to the Hudson's Bay Company.

Freight rates under the York boat transport system were necessarily high. The load of a boat consisted of at least seventy bundles, or "pieces," each piece of 90 pounds weight. From York Factory to Norway House, the freight charge per piece was \$3.50; from York Factory to the Red River settlement, \$4.50; from York Factory to Edmonton, \$7.50; to Athabaska, \$10.00; and to the Mackenzie River, \$12.50.

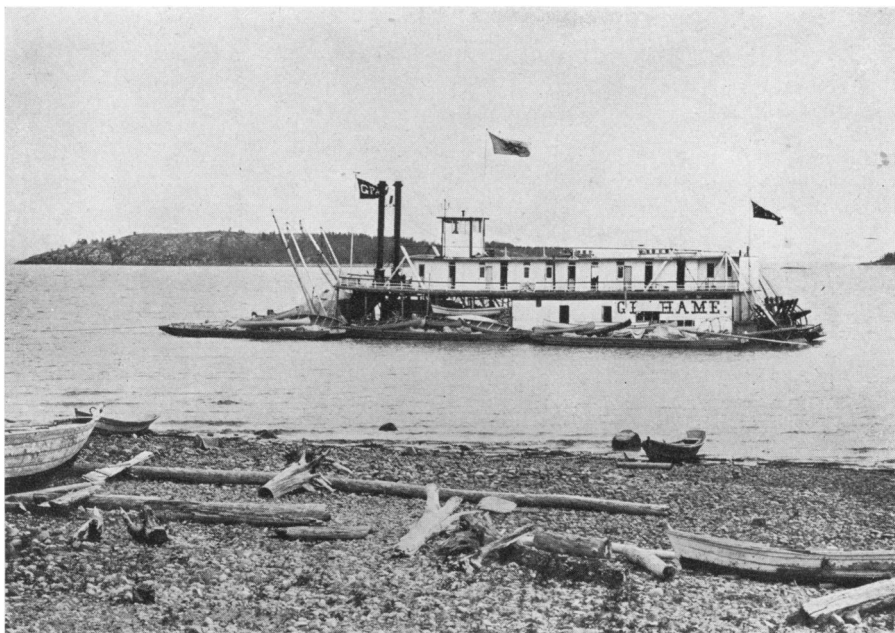


FIG. 14



FIG. 15

FIG. 14—The Hudson's Bay Company's steamer *Graham*, Lake Athabaska, June, 1914. The *Graham* is a typical stern-wheeler that has seen service since 1882. (Photo by Francis Harper.)

FIG. 15—Modern transportation on the Peace River: the steamer *D. A. Thomas* at Peace River. (Photo by F. H. McLearn.)



FIG. 16



FIG. 17

FIG. 16—At the head of the Grand Rapids of the Athabaska River. (Photo by F. J. Alcock.)

FIG. 17—The tramway across Grand Rapids Island, connecting the interrupted reaches of the Athabaska River. (Photo by Francis Harper.)



FIG. 18

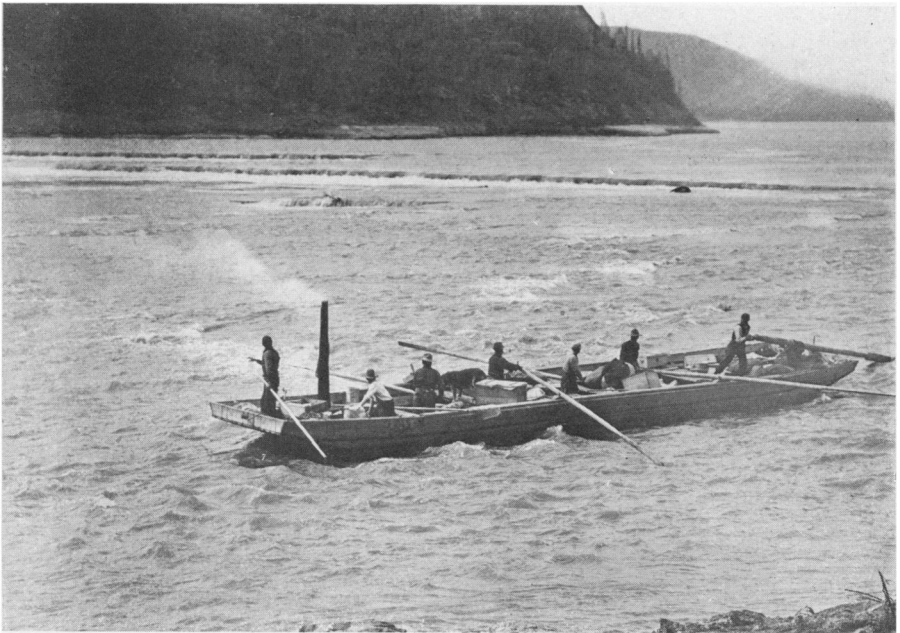


FIG. 19

FIG. 18—Tracking a scow up the Athabaska River. (Photo by Charles Camsell.)

FIG. 19—An Athabaska River scow below the Big Cascade. The Athabaska River scow is the type of boat commonly used on the Athabaska, Slave, and Mackenzie Rivers. (Photo by Francis Harper.)

The Plains Routes

For twenty years after the arrival of the first contingent of Lord Selkirk's settlers at the Red River, all the supplies for the colony came in from York Factory. In 1832, however, a considerable trade between St. Paul and the Red River settlements began to be conducted by private merchants who carted their goods overland. Finally in 1860 the Hudson's Bay Company also began to make use of the American railroads. A stage line was established between the town of St. Cloud on the Mississippi River and Georgetown on the Red River, and from Georgetown communication with Fort Garry at the junction of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers was effected by river steamer. Private traders were compelled to freight their goods overland from St. Cloud until 1871, when an opposition steamer began to make trips between Moorhead and Fort Garry. With the arrival of the Northern Pacific Railway at Moorhead in 1872 the new route to the Red River district became the important one, and a fleet of steamers and barges were soon engaged in the trade.

The new route resulted in making Fort Garry, or Winnipeg, the point of entrance to the Canadian West, and, as it increased in importance, York Factory proportionately declined. One by one the trading districts of the interior ceased sending their boat brigades to York and began to get their supplies through Fort Garry, until York became, what it remains today, merely the head post for the Hudson Bay district.

RED RIVER CARTS

With Fort Garry as the new headquarters, supplies were carried to the Western posts by cart brigades. In the year 1876 between four and five thousand carts were loaded at Winnipeg to cross the plains. The cart employed was a unique two-wheeled affair made entirely of wood and had the reputation of being able to go anywhere, no matter how rough the country. It was drawn by a single animal, either ox or horse, and carried on an average from eight hundred to one thousand pounds. One of its most characteristic features was its melancholy squeaking. The carts, often one hundred to a brigade, usually traveled in single file along trails that were followed year after year. In places along the more commonly used routes, such as the trails to Edmonton and Battleford, as many as twenty deep parallel ruts marked the course. From Winnipeg to Edmonton the distance by cart trail was 890 miles.

The Saskatchewan Steamboats

In addition to the Red River cart, another method of transportation came into prominence which further took the place of the York boat in freighting on the Saskatchewan. This was the river steamer. Between the years 1870 and 1886 seven large stern-wheel boats were built and operated on the Saskatchewan River carrying supplies from Grand Rapids as far as Medicine

Hat on the South Branch and Edmonton on the North Branch. These boats varied in length from 100 to 210 feet, and one of them was built of steel. Navigation was often difficult, owing to shallow water, shifting bars, strong currents, and stretches of swift water, up which the vessels had to be winched.

In the early years of the Saskatchewan steamers the cargoes were brought partly from York Factory and partly from Fort Garry by steamer up Lake Winnipeg to Grand Rapids, where they were portaged across on the tram-



FIG. 20—Tracking a scow up the Athabaska River. (Photo by Charles Camsell.)

way. At first the river steamers ran only as far as Fort Carlton or Prince Albert. From here the freight for the North country was carted overland to Green Lake, a distance of approximately one hundred miles, and then taken down the Beaver River to Lake Isle à la Crosse on the Churchill River and from there along the old York boat route to Methye Portage. Beginning in 1877, however, the steamer service was extended on up the Saskatchewan as far as Edmonton. In 1886 the long trips from Grand Rapids to Edmonton were abandoned owing to the shallowness of the river and the approach

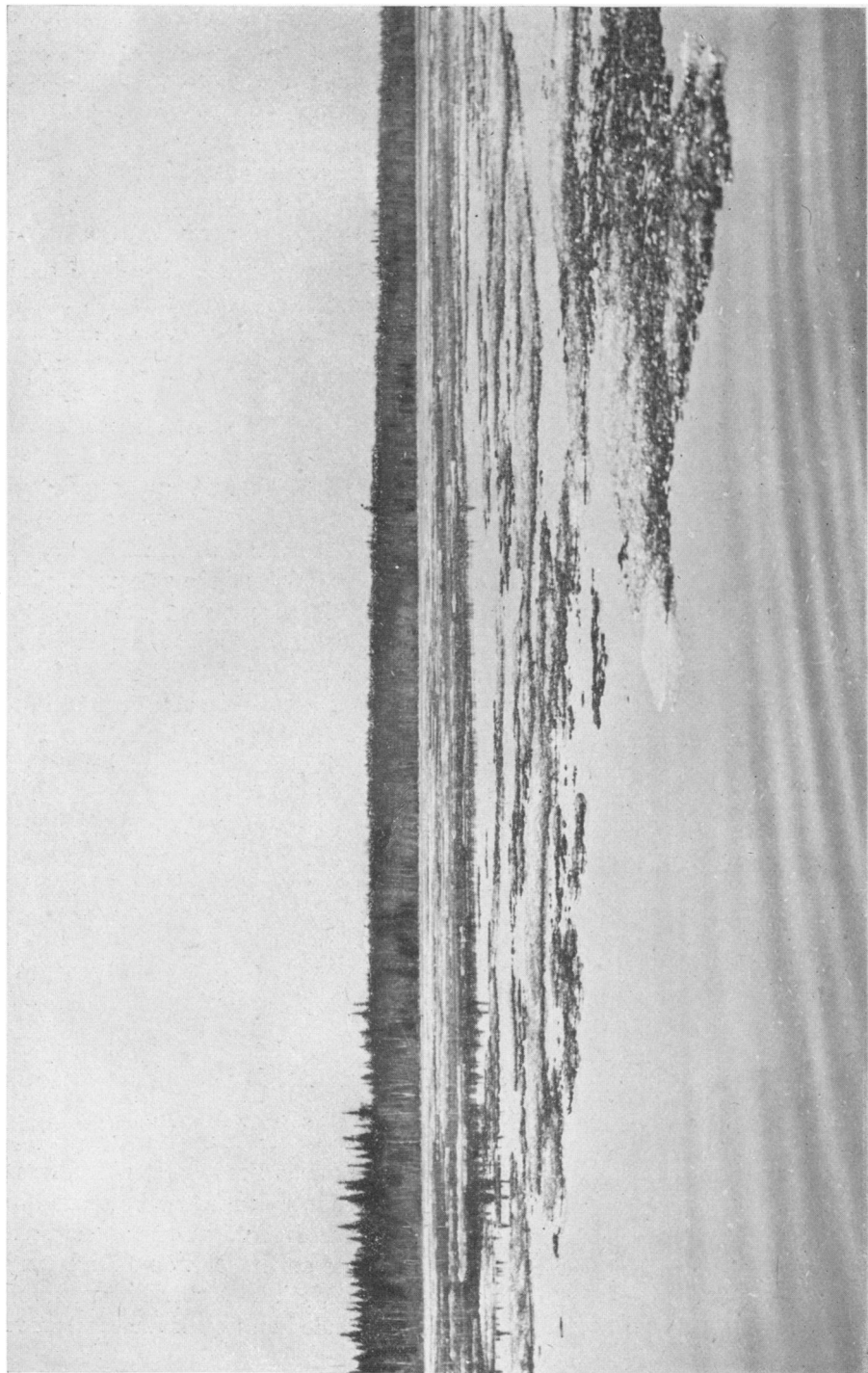


FIG. 21—A Northern lake in June. Note the ice in process of disappearance. (Photo by F. J. Alcock.)



FIG. 22—Fort Chipewyan, an important distributing post of the Hudson's Bay Company at the western end of Lake Athabaska (Photo by F. J. Alcock)

of the railway to Prince Albert and Edmonton, from which places supplies were transported across the plains by carts. Though a few trips as far as Edmonton were made as late as 1891, very little navigation was carried on along the Saskatchewan from 1886 until 1904, owing to the advance of the railway and to the fact that settlement was taking place along it rather than along the river.

The Athabaska Routes

Mention has been already made of the different modes of transportation to Methye Portage and of the route from there down the Clearwater and Athabaska Rivers to Fort Chipewyan, the important distributing post of the North situated at the western end of Lake Athabaska. From it supplies were sent up the Peace River, down the Slave and Mackenzie Rivers, and east along Lake Athabaska to Fond du Lac.

An alternative route to Fort Chipewyan led from Edmonton on the Saskatchewan to the Athabaska River, a trail approximately 100 miles in length connecting Edmonton and Athabaska Landing. This would early have led to the abandonment of the Methye Portage route had it not been for the character of the Athabaska River between Athabaska Landing and Fort McMurray, situated at the junction of the Clearwater with the Athabaska. Immediately above Fort McMurray the Athabaska for a distance of about 90 miles is broken up into a series of rapids connected by stretches of smooth water. One of these, the Grand Rapids of the Athabaska, long presented greater difficulties than the Methye Portage, and it was not until an Athabaska boatman, Louis Faissonneuve, known on the river as "Captain Shott," demonstrated that a scow could safely be run down the Grand Rapids that the old route by the long portage became entirely abandoned. Henceforth all the supplies for the Northland came by way of Edmonton and Athabaska Landing. In 1891 the railway reached Edmonton, but it was not until 1912 that the freight train superseded the wagon on the trail from Edmonton to Athabaska Landing.

METHOD OF TRANSPORTATION

Transportation down the Athabaska was by river scows, boats built for drifting downstream. The Athabaska River scow is a flat-bottomed boat, having a length of 50 feet and a width of 12 feet at the top and 8 feet at the bottom. It is planked with inch lumber and calked with tar. A sweep 35 feet in length, balanced at the stern, is used for steering, and by it a single steersman can guide the drifting craft. Four oars, each 22 feet in length, are used for rowing when it is necessary to aid the steersman. While the Athabaska remained the important route to the north, as many as one hundred scows were run down annually from Athabaska Landing to Fort Chipewyan. As a rule the scows made but one trip, being broken up for lumber when they reached Lake Athabaska.



FIG. 23



FIG. 24

FIG. 23—Some tepees of Chipewyan Indians and the Roman Catholic Mission of Fond du Lac at the eastern end of Lake Athabaska. (Photo by F. J. Alcock.)

FIG. 24—A Cree Indian and his grandchildren, Cranberry Portage, Manitoba. The Crees, to the south of a rough boundary marked by Lake Athabaska and the Churchill River, and the Chipewyans to the north of it, constitute the two main Indian stocks inhabiting the Canadian Northwest beyond the settled belt. (Photo by E. L. Bruce.)

The first one hundred miles below Athabaska Landing the river flows smoothly, and the scow brigades could drift downstream steadily both day and night. A few rapids are then easily run, and another fifty miles brings one to the Grand Rapids of the Athabaska, where in a distance of less than one mile the river falls sixty feet. An island in the middle of the rapid divides the stream into a right and a left channel. The left has the greater volume of water but is so rough that canoes and scows never attempt it. Scows were run to the head of the island in the middle of the stream and unloaded. An experienced steersman with a picked crew at the oars and men at the bow with poles would then run the scow down the right-hand channel. A rope fastened to a log run out from the lower end of the island would be picked up by the men on the scow and the scow pulled up to the foot of the island. In the meantime the cargo could be portaged over the island by means of several small flat cars on a rough tramway. This miniature railway, which was maintained by the Hudson's Bay Company until 1915, not only transported all their own supplies over Grand Rapids Island, but turned in an annual profit to the company from the freight charges collected from other users.

Below the Grand Rapids, other rapids follow in swift succession; two of these, known as the Little and the Big Cascades, where the river drops over low limestone ledges, sometimes gave trouble to the scows in periods of low water. Arrived at Fort McMurray at the mouth of the Clearwater River, there were no more rapids to be encountered for the remainder of the journey to Fort Chipewyan. In fact, from Fort McMurray to the Arctic Ocean the only break that river steamers cannot pass is the rapids on the Slave River between Lake Athabaska and Great Slave Lake; a wagon road sixteen miles in length connects Fitzgerald and Fort Smith at the two ends of this rapid. As early as 1882 the Hudson's Bay Company had a steamer, the *Grahame*, on the lower Athabaska and since that time has maintained steamers on the Peace, Athabaska, and Mackenzie Rivers.

Recent Railroad Development

Just as the advance of the railroad on the plains in 1886 was largely responsible for the decline of steamer freighting on the Saskatchewan, so more recent advances have effected similar changes in connection with the Athabaska routes. In 1915 a line of railway from Edmonton reached the town of Peace River, and trade for the North began to go by way of the Peace instead of down the Athabaska. The Peace is the slightly larger river and, for a distance of 770 miles from Fitzgerald on the Slave River to Hudson's Hope above the town of Peace River, the only break to steamer navigation along its course is at Vermilion Chutes, about 300 miles below Peace River. Stern-wheeled steamers ply both above and below the Chutes, and a wagon road $4\frac{1}{2}$ miles in length is used for teaming the cargoes from one steamer to another. It is interesting to note that the year 1914, which was the last year for the Athabaska scow brigades to take the northern freight to Fort

Chipewyan, was the year of the death of "Captain Shott" at Athabaska Landing.

A new line of railroad is once again to change the route to the Mackenzie River region. A railroad from Edmonton to Fort McMurray on the Athabaska River below all the Athabaska rapids is nearing completion. Communication will then readily be made by rail to Fort McMurray and from there by steamer to Fort Chipewyan and Fitzgerald. Fort McMurray will accordingly supersede Peace River as the rendezvous for the Northern trade just as the latter superseded Athabaska Landing in 1915, and once again the Athabaska River will become the route to Lake Athabaska and the Mackenzie River country.

The railway has also recently advanced into the North country in a different direction. In 1908 location work was begun by the government of Canada on a railroad to the shores of Hudson Bay. Since 1917 work on the road has been suspended, but at the present time the steel is laid to within 92 miles of the bay, and considerable progress has been made in establishing a terminal at Port Nelson at the mouth of the Nelson River near York Factory. A fortnightly train service is maintained at present from the town of The Pas over the line as far as Mile 214. It is hoped that the new Hudson Bay route will some day become one of the main trade routes of the Canadian West, giving an outlet to Europe for the grain fields of Western Canada.

In the regions where the railroad has not as yet penetrated, relics of the old methods of transportation are still encountered. The canoe as used by the North-Westerners is still the common method of summer transportation as soon as one departs from the railroad or steamer routes. Though Norway House is now supplied by the Lake Winnipeg steamers, York boat brigades still ply on the Nelson and the Echimamish between Norway House and Oxford House. The Red River cart, on the other hand, has entirely disappeared. In 1912, when the Lord Selkirk Association celebrated the one hundredth anniversary of the arrival of the first contingent of Lord Selkirk's settlers into the Red River district, an effort was made to collect specimens of all the utensils and implements used by them. Among other things a Red River cart was desired, but search for one was made in vain from Winnipeg to Edmonton, and one had to be manufactured. Within the last few years, the Athabaska River scow has likewise become relatively a thing of the past, its place having been taken by the river steamer. The importance of the latter is increasing. On the Saskatchewan River since 1904 about twenty steam vessels of various sizes and types have been operated from local points, and at the present time about ten of these still operate, with the town of The Pas as their home port, being largely engaged in the traffic with the new mining region north of Cumberland House.